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SUBJECT: Honduran Elections: Rules of the Game

REF: Tegucigalpa 2346 and previous

[1](#)1. Summary. Honduran general elections will take place November 27. Under a new Electoral law reform passed early in 2004, Honduran voters will for the first time in a general election be able to select individual candidates for Congress shown on the ballot with their picture as well as their name. The direct election of congressional members contrasts with the old party slate system whereby candidates were elected on rank-ordered congressional lists. A Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), managed by three political party appointees, has national authority to run the elections. End Summary.

General Elections - Five Parties Participating

[1](#)2. Honduran general elections will take place November 27. Voters will be selecting candidates for president/vice president, congress, and mayor/city councils. The candidates will be from all five parties, the National Party (PN), the Liberal Party (PL), the Innovation and National Unity Party (PINU), the Christian Democratic Party (DC), and the Democratic Unification Party (UD).

TSE - Key Institution for Elections

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[1](#)3. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) has the authority over the elections. It will oversee 298 municipal commissions who report to 18 departmental commissions which in turn report to the TSE. Each party in theory will also have a representative at each voting table, as well as at the municipal and departmental commissions. According to the Electoral Law, the departmental and municipal tribunals will continue to operate up to a month after the elections are over. Their main purpose and function is to monitor departmental and municipal electoral results and send them to Tegucigalpa for the official tally.

[1](#)4. The TSE budget is 180 million lempiras (USD 9.5 million) for the general elections, including funds from international donors. The TSE has approximately 140 employees - 60 administrative, 40 technical staff, and 40 support staff. In addition it has temporarily hired 1,580 people through the country to run the electoral tribunals - departmental and municipal. It will hire an additional 800 people; 300 people who will register the ballot information as it comes in to the TSE, and 500 people as temporary workers in the warehouses, charged with the management and packing of all electoral materials to be delivered throughout the country. The TSE must train all poll workers; there will be 96,000 - 168,000 poll workers. Police and the military will be responsible for the transport and security of ballots.

[1](#)5. The TSE consists of President Aristides Mejia (PL), Magistrate Jacobo Hernandez Cruz (PN), Magistrate Saul Escobar (DC), and Backup Magistrate Yolanda de Vargas (PINU). All formal TSE decisions are by majority vote by the three magistrates.

Photos and Other New Aspects of Ballots and Voting

[1](#)6. Under a new Electoral law passed in January 2004 that came into effect in April 2004, Honduran voters will, for the first time in a general election, be able to select individual candidates for Congress, shown on the ballot with their picture as well as their name. The presidential ballots will have the presidential and vice presidential candidates, the municipal ballots will have the mayoral candidate and deputy mayoral candidates, and congressional ballots will have all the congressional candidates. The direct election of congressional members contrasts with the old party slate system whereby candidates were elected on rank-ordered congressional lists. Congressional candidates are selected at-large and do not represent individual districts. On the congressional ballot, voters can "cross" their votes and select individual candidates from different parties.

[1](#)7. The ballot will be a paper ballot printed in color, with a

box under the name/photo of each candidate. Voters will use a special black crayon pencil to vote and must check a box below their choice (or mark the photo) for the ballot to be valid. The congressional and municipal ballots votes will include, for the first time, the pictures of the presidential candidates for the National, Liberal, and Christian Democratic Parties on the left-hand side of the ballot (with slogans as well for the National and Liberal Parties). The UD and PINU parties chose not to include their presidential candidates' photos on the ballots and will only have their parties' symbols.

18. The TSE has ruled that a maximum of 350 people will vote at any voting "table." The TSE will also have multiple voting booths at each electoral table so that voting may be simultaneous. Electronic voting, using machines on loan from Brazil, will take place on a test case basis in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and a small town to be determined by the TSE. People will be chosen at random to cast their electronic vote. The electronic vote will only be an exercise; it will not count.

19. The TSE will rely during this election on the voting booth closing minutes which are the official tallies of votes. During the general elections, three different formulas are used to define the three different elections that take place. The presidential elections are decided by simple majority vote, the congressional election by proportional representation of quotients and residues (left over votes), and the municipal elections are determined by a mixture of the two formulas mentioned above (see septel for details).

10. The new law limits campaigns to 90 days for general elections; the campaigns must officially end midnight November 21. A political candidate can run for one political position only. The office of Vice President was created, and the current system of three presidential designates was eliminated in the new law. The law also mandated limited campaign finance reporting requirements.

Almost 4 Million Eligible Voters

11. There are 3,976,549 million people on the final list of eligible voters for the general election. (Honduras has a population of approximately 7 million.) Honduran voters in the U.S. will be able to vote for President and Vice President in the general election at Honduran consulates. Suffrage is universal and mandatory for those 18 and older; however, the clergy and members of the military or civilian security forces are not permitted to vote. Convicted felons cannot vote.